

# Outreach

Summer 2004

## A Step Closer to Equality and Fairness with the Domestic Partnership Act by Governor James E. McGreevey

On July 11, 2004, our State's historic Domestic Partnership Act was enacted, making New Jersey one of only five states in the nation to pass such a law. As Governor, I am proud that our State is finally granting individuals who have entered into an enduring, committed relationship the basic rights they deserve.

The Domestic Partnership Act marks yet another major milestone in New Jersey's long history of progress in civil rights and social justice. I am confident that the Domestic Partnership Act will not only be remembered as a victory for civil rights, but also as the day New Jersey took a stand for fairness and for dignity.

Under the Domestic Partnership Act, individuals who meet a series of standards, including cohabitation and joint finances, are eligible to make critical health care decisions, visit a loved one in hospital, file for a state income tax deduction for dependents, file for a State inheritance-tax exemption, and gain statutory protection against prejudice under New Jersey's Law Against Discrimination. The legislation also makes domestic partners of New Jersey State workers eligible to receive certain health care and retirement benefits.

I signed the Domestic Partnership into law because it is a matter of equality and decency. Individuals should be able to visit a loved one in their hospital room and, if needed, make critical health care decisions for them. The legislation is a matter of simple justice – a recognition that those committed individuals who build a life together should be able to share its rewards with one another. The Domestic Partnership Act grants important rights and privileges to more of New Jersey's citizens because, quite simply, it is the right thing to do.



In order to qualify as domestic partners, individuals must be same-sex couples who each are at least 18 years old or opposite-sex couples who each are at least 62 years old. Individuals can enter into a domestic partnership if they:

- Share a common residence in New Jersey (or in another state if at least one person is a member of a New Jersey State-administered retirement system)
- Are jointly responsible for each other's welfare as shown by joint financial arrangements or joint ownership of property

- Are unrelated to each other and are not in a marriage or domestic partnership with another person
- Agree to be jointly responsible for each other's basic living expenses
- Have chosen to share each other's lives in a committed relationship of mutual caring.

Those who meet the above criteria then need to complete and file an *Affidavit of Domestic Partnership*

with their local registrar. The cost for filing such an affidavit is \$28 – the same filing fee as a marriage license. In order to create a valid New Jersey domestic partnership, a couple must:

- Complete and sign in the presence of a notary the joint *Affidavit of Domestic Partnership*
- File the *Affidavit* with any local registrar of vital statistics in any municipality in the State and pay a \$28 filing fee
- Receive from the registrar the *Certificate of Domestic Partnership* and the *Notice of Rights and Obligations*.

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## Ensuring Disabled Access to Polling Sites is Vital to Genuine Democracy

by Attorney General Peter C. Harvey



Attorney General  
Peter C. Harvey

We are fortunate to live in a society where every person – except those judged mentally incompetent, legally under age, or prohibited by laws pertaining to a felony

conviction – has the right to vote.

Of course, it was not always this way.

In the not-too-distant past, many people in our nation fought — and many gave their lives — for the cause of access to the ballot for all citizens.

The fight for voting rights tells you something about the power that voting confers upon each citizen.

It is a power we should not treat lightly. Indeed, voting is the heart of our democracy. It is a right we should respect, and one that we have a civic duty to exercise.

As Attorney General, I am committed to ensuring that registered voters who seek to vote find the process as inclusive, as accessible and as user-friendly as possible.

Accordingly, we at the Office of the Attorney General have undertaken a number of important, voting-related initiatives.

In several counties, we are working with local election officials to replace outdated voting machines with new, state-of-the-art electronic voting technology.

In addition, we have launched a comprehensive public education and awareness campaign designed to encourage all New Jerseyans – and particularly our young people — to register, and to vote. The campaign's slogan is "Be Powerful, Be Heard," and a key feature is a series of pre-recorded television Public Service Announcements, or PSAs, featuring celebrity volunteers with ties to New Jersey. Among the celebrities who have donated their time to record PSAs are: actor Jason

Alexander (Seinfeld), hip-hop entrepreneur Russell Simmons (founder, Def Jam Records), actor Michael Douglas (Wall Street, An American President), comedian Joe Piscopo (Saturday Night Live), actors Federico Castelluccio and Al Sapienza (The Sopranos), hip-hop recording artists The Reverend Run, Doug E. Fresh, MC Lite, and actor William Baldwin (Backdraft, Internal Affairs).

There is another crucial element that we cannot – and will not — overlook: we must ensure that every person who wants to vote can physically gain access to his or her designated polling site.

Beyond the simple fact that 100 percent polling place accessibility is required by law, it is also the right thing to do if we are going to "walk it like we talk it" when it comes to participatory democracy.

The most compelling voter awareness campaigns we can devise, and the most advanced voting machine technology we can buy, are useless if a significant cross-section of voters cannot get to – or through – the polling place door.

With this in mind, we have begun a comprehensive, statewide effort to inspect polling sites, identify those which are not 100 percent accessible, and have those sites either improved or, in the alternative, relocated.

During the non-partisan municipal elections in May, 40 State inspection teams made up of personnel from the Office of the Attorney General, the Division on Civil Rights, the Division of Elections and the Division of Consumer Affairs visited a total of 150 polling places in eight New Jersey counties.

During the Primary Election in June, another 40 inspection teams visited a total of 350 polling sites in all 21 counties.

What our inspectors found were enough violations to make it plain we have more work to do before it can be said that New Jersey polling places are 100 percent accessible.

Some problems identified by our inspectors

were minor – for example, missing or misplaced signs directing persons to areas that were accessible to the handicapped. Other problems were more serious — for example, missing curb cuts in parking lots, doors found locked that were intended for disabled access, and missing ramps.

By law, the Board of Elections in each county is responsible for ensuring that polling places are accessible to all voters, including those with physical disabilities.

As a follow-up to our inspections, we have forwarded letters to each county describing the nature of any problems detected, and requesting that they provide a description of how, and in what time frame, they intend to resolve those problems.

We have also indicated a readiness to assist the counties in any way we can to achieve 100 percent polling place accessibility. Our ultimate goal in pursuing this initiative is to work side-by-side with local jurisdictions to ensure polling place access, not to file lawsuits or impose sanctions.

So far, the results have been largely positive.

Reports from the field indicate that our inspection teams have received excellent cooperation when they've visited polling sites. In addition, county-level election officials have, by and large, expressed an eagerness to work cooperatively with the State to correct polling place accessibility problems.

As an Attorney General committed to promoting and protecting civil rights — and as New Jersey's Chief Election Official — I am encouraged by this response. However, I would be remiss if I failed to make plain that we are serious about ensuring the disabled an equal opportunity to vote.

We will not rest until New Jersey has achieved 100 percent polling place accessibility, and we stand ready to take enforcement action in any situation where violations related to disabled access are not

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## From the Desk of the Director

### Continuing Need for “Anti-Bullying” Efforts in Schools



Director J. Frank Vespa-Papaleo

In a Director’s Order issued on July 26, 2004, I concluded that a school district violated the New Jersey Law Against Discrimination (LAD) when it failed to take appropriate corrective action in response to a student’s

repeated reports that he was being verbally and physically abused by other students because they perceived him to be homosexual. On March 12, 1999, the student and his mother filed a complaint with DCR against the Toms River Regional Schools Board of Education. The complaint alleged that the student was repeatedly subjected to anti-homosexual harassment by a number of students. The incidents included the student being struck on the back of the neck with a gold chain by one student and called a “faggot” by another student. This was one in a series of episodes of bias-based harassment, thereby creating a hostile school environment.

In issuing this Director’s Order, I addressed an issue of first impression under the LAD, namely, what standards should be applied to determine a school district’s liability for bias-based harassment of students by either school employees or other students. Although the New Jersey Courts have developed a clear and forceful body of case law establishing liability standards for bias-based harassment in the workplace, they have not yet developed liability standards for bias-based harassment of students in New Jersey schools. Based in part on the absence of prior court rulings on this issue, the Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) who heard testimony and issued a recommended decision in this matter concluded that the LAD did not provide a cause of action for bias-based peer harassment of school students. In my final decision, I relied on New Jersey case law and the legislative policies underlying the LAD to disagree with the ALJ’s analysis and instead conclude that bias-based harassment of school students is actionable under the LAD.

The New Jersey Legislature has long made it a priority to ensure that the children of this state

have equal and unfettered access to a public education, and has taken forceful action to make discrimination in the public schools a violation of civil rights, since public schools are places of public accommodations subject to the LAD. Most would agree that in past decades, schools have made great strides in teaching children to reject racial, ethnic and religious biases they may have learned elsewhere in society. The LAD was not amended to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation until 1991. This relatively recent legislative recognition that people need and deserve protection from discrimination based on sexual orientation requires that the schools similarly educate students regarding sexual orientation to create a culture of acceptance and to affirmatively reject bigotry and biases that still permeate some aspects of our society. Although a school district may not be expected to protect students from all peer harassment, its obligation to protect students includes taking preventative and remedial action to protect students from foreseeable bias-based harassment.

Based on the clear policy of the LAD and the case law interpreting it, I concluded that harassment based on a protected characteristic (such as race, national origin, gender, religion or sexual orientation) may violate the LAD when it is so severe or pervasive that a reasonable student sharing the same protected characteristic would find the school environment hostile or abusive. Adopting standards similar to those established by our New Jersey Supreme Court for bias-based harassment in the workplace, I concluded that a school district may be held liable for unlawful bias-based harassment of students where the school administration or its employees knew or should have known of the harassment and failed to take effective measures to stop it. Based on the particular facts presented in the Toms River case, I ordered the school district to implement more effective policies, procedures and training to protect students from anti-homosexual harassment, and awarded monetary damages for pain and humiliation to the complainants. I also awarded the maximum penalty permitted under the LAD for matters that are filed administratively.

Hopefully, this case will serve to raise awareness among students, educators and parents about the impact of bias-based bullying and harassment, and the potential connection between bullying and other forms of bias-based violent behavior. Addressing these issues are among some of the goals of the “New Jersey Cares About Bullying” campaign, an ongoing statewide public awareness initiative emanating from anti-bullying legislation signed into law by Governor James E. McGreevey on September 6, 2002, after the Legislature unanimously approved the law’s passage in 2002.

As part of our outreach efforts, the New Jersey Division on Civil Rights is working proactively with the Office of Bias Crime and Community Relations to train educators, administrators and support staff on the LAD and bias-based bullying. The training is designed to explain the laws we enforce, the roles of local and state law enforcement and to advise participants how to identify and intervene in bullying incidents.

The prosecution of discrimination cases is always our last resort here at the Division. As with all complaints brought before this agency, we attempt mediation with both parties and only when those efforts fail do we transmit the case to the Office of Administrative Law for hearing as a contested matter. It is my hope that our continuing involvement in public education initiatives and training programs will help prevent acts of discrimination from occurring in the first place, and reduce the need to seek remedies through the legal system. If you know a school or organization that would like to find out about anti-bullying training, please call our Division’s Bureau of Prevention and Community Relations at (609) 292-2918. As Governor James McGreevey stated as he signed the anti-bullying law, “students and parents can be assured that cruel and harmful treatment—whether at school, on the bus, or at a school function—will not be tolerated” because our “children deserve to receive a quality education in a safe environment, where they are free from threats and harassment.” When a school permits a hostile school environment to exist, it must be dealt with quickly, seriously and thoroughly. ▼





## Employer Advisory Council To Hold First Meeting In Mt. Laurel

Armando Riccio, co-chairman of the Division on Civil Rights' newly-created Employer Advisory Council (EAC), said employers who attend the EAC's first meeting on September 23 in Mt. Laurel will expect results for their investment of time and effort.

"There's a lot riding on this," said Riccio, an attorney in the labor and employment group of the South Jersey law firm Capehart Scatchard. "To have credibility with employers who may already view the Division as being pro-employee, we will have to be willing to really listen to their concerns and take action."

Riccio represents management in legal matters involving discrimination, harassment, retaliation and wrongful termination claims, and has litigated complaints before the Division on Civil Rights. He said there will always be certain

issues that management and labor cannot agree on.

"But it does not have to be that way in every regard," said Riccio, who is one of five co-chairs on the council representing the north, south, east and central regions of the state. "Some aspects of the law or regulations may be well-intended, but do not serve the intended purpose. Or, they may have an unintended negative consequence that outweighs any benefit or utility. The Council is intended to facilitate some dialogue on those issues and identify common ground resolution."

EAC Coordinator Bear Atwood, who serves as special assistant to the Director, said that a wide range of employers from throughout New Jersey have registered for the September 23 meeting. In addition to Division Director J. Frank Vespa-Papaleo, attorneys and senior staff from the

Division's Bureau of Prevention and Community Relations are attending the meeting.

"The meeting will provide an opportunity for employers to participate in a dialogue with senior Division on Civil Rights staff," said Atwood. "Following a presentation with an overview of the Division and our many services, Director Vespa-Papelao and the Division staff will discuss how the employers and the Division can work together. We know New Jersey employers want to have productive, discrimination-free workplaces. This Council can provide an important partnership for employers and the Division as we work together to meet that goal."

For more information about the EAC contact Bear Atwood at 609-292-5326. ▼

## Domestic Partnership Act

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The forms and an informational brochure are available from any local registrar of vital statistics in any municipality in the State. A list of the names, addresses, and phone numbers of all of the local registrars is accessible through the Department of Health and Senior Services Web site: <http://www.state.nj.us/health/vital/regbycnty.shtml>.

There also is a toll-free hotline for questions regarding domestic partnerships – 1-866-722-8212. The Web sites for the following State agencies also have information about the new law: Department of Banking and Insurance, <http://www.state.nj.us/dobi/>; Department of Health and Senior Services, <http://www.state.nj.us/health/>; and Department of Treasury-Division of Pensions and Benefits, <http://www.state.nj.us/treasury/pensions/>. ▼

### Domestic Partnership Hotline 1-866-722-8218

Mon - Fri. 8:30 - 4:30

Brought to you by the  
NJ Department of Health and  
Senior Services, Bureau of Vital  
Statistics and Registration

## Polling Sites

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being addressed after a reasonable amount of time.

Ultimately, making voting places accessible to the disabled serves all New Jerseyans. For if we fail to provide 100 percent access, it raises serious issues under federal and state anti-discrimination laws, including New Jersey's Law Against Discrimination. In addition, failing to provide access to the disabled could jeopardize millions of dollars of funding to New Jersey under the federal Help America Vote Act (HAVA). Finally — and perhaps most crucially — ensuring that voters with disabilities can cast their ballots in a voting booth like anyone else is consistent with our staunch commitment to protecting the voting rights — and the civil rights — of all our citizens. ▼

## Friends of the Division: A Conversation with Chief Administrative Law Judge Laura Sanders

*"Friends of the Division" is a regular column profiling agencies, organizations and individuals with whom the Division works closely.*

### Q. Please tell us about your background in the law and government service.

I came to the Office of Administrative Law (OAL) from the Office of Chief Counsel to Governor McGreevey, where I was deputy chief counsel with particular responsibility for budget and Treasury matters. I had served as an Assistant State Treasurer for approximately seven years during the Kean and Florio administrations and also worked as Human Resources Director at Drew University and at The Apex Management Group, where I assisted clients in complying with the regulatory requirements to enter the managed care business. In my first years in state government, I worked in the Insurance Department and Housing & Mortgage Finance Agency.

Through those positions, I had the experience of being on both sides of the regulatory world — advising government officials on the exercise of state power, and advising those impacted by state action and regulation.

In addition, through working in different kinds of settings with a range of boards and commissions and having the good fortune to serve under some enormously gifted administrators, I gained exposure to a broad range of administrative issues. This has proven very useful in approaching both the courtroom and the management of an agency which is faced with the task of handling more than 10,000 cases a year with approximately 37 judges.

### Q. What is the Office of Administrative Law (OAL) and do you find it an effective agency to resolve disputes? How does the OAL differ from the state court system?

The OAL was created 25 years ago to provide citizens with a fair and independent hearing in a whole range of matters involving state agency action. These run the gamut, from Lemon Law issues to civil rights, and from emergency



Chief Administrative Law Judge Laura Sanders

shelter for homeless persons, to special education for learning-disabled children to electric utility rates.

The question of dispute resolution is complex. The OAL is effective at persuading parties to settle cases, but in cases where parties cannot settle, the dispute frequently centers on the parties having two very different versions of what the facts are. In those cases, the OAL plays an important role in assessing the credibility of witnesses and making findings of fact. Once the facts are clear, the judge (and eventually the agency) can turn to the often sticky question of how the law applies to them.

The OAL differs from municipal and superior courts in that the judge always has to produce a written decision, laying out the facts, the law, and how the judge has applied the law to the facts. Procedurally, the OAL is less formal, and in keeping with the substantial number of people who appear without a lawyer, the rules of evidence are somewhat relaxed (especially in relation to hearsay, which is admitted). Virtually all types of cases are subject to statutory time frames within which the judge must decide the case.

### Q. Should ALJs have areas of specialization so they become very proficient in certain areas of the law, or should the OAL handle all types of cases?

ALJs do have expertise in specific areas of the law, frequently from their experience prior to coming to the OAL, but also through training and hearing cases at the OAL. There have been times in the OAL's history when ALJs were more specialized than they are currently, although we still try to match the complexity of the case to the experience of the judge in the particular area.

### Q. How is your office dealing with the shortage of judges and delays in adjudicating cases?

In order to reduce the number of hearings necessary, we have been using staff attorneys to conduct settlement conferences and have, wherever possible, utilized retired judges to hear cases. We have geared up our intern program to provide additional capacity for legal research to help judges move cases quickly, and we were very pleased to see that A-3088, sponsored by Assemblyman Neil Cohen, passed the Assembly in June, as it will allow the recall of retired judges over age 70 to help us in moving the caseload.

### Q. What suggestions do you have for people litigating cases before the OAL to make the process work smoothly?

No matter whether you are an individual or an attorney, be prepared. What are the strongest points in your favor? What are the strongest points on the other side? If there are issues related to discovery, address them earlier, not later. Attorneys need to be judicious with the use of motions, as it is may be much more time-effective for all concerned to have the judge spend time deciding the case, not the motion. Above all, extend respect to the tribunal, to the witnesses and to the adversary. ▼



## Division on Civil Rights and EEOC Working Cooperatively

by Marie Tomasso,

Director of the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Philadelphia District Office

In my eight years as Director of the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's (EEOC) Philadelphia District Office, I have been privileged to work with numerous individuals who believe strongly in laws and regulations designed to protecting individuals against unfair treatment and discrimination.

A commitment to civil and human rights is essential to our work. However, it is also critically important that in carrying out our statutory responsibilities we convey to the public that not all complaints are valid. Having the intellectual and legal honesty to discern bogus complaints from valid ones is a large measure of our credibility with the public, and particularly with those who may be the recipient of charges of discrimination.

Under the direction and leadership of Division on Civil Rights Director J. Frank Vespa-Papaleo, the State of New Jersey has set the bar high in its approach to enforcing anti-discrimination statutes and educating the public on the Law Against Discrimination (LAD). Whether it's an anti-Semitic incident in Glen Ridge, the violation of the rights of day laborers in Freehold or racial steering in Montclair, the Division has responded to protect those at risk.

Director Vespa-Papaleo shares my commitment to eradicating employment discrimination with the legal and organizational resources at our disposal. As a result, we have made cooperation and joint efforts between the two agencies a priority. In testimony to this commitment, both Director Vespa-Papaleo and I were recently awarded the Annual Public Service Commendation Award in the Furtherance of Proactive Prevention on the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. EEOC Chair Cari M. Dominguez presented the awards on June 24, at the EEOC - FEPA National Training Conference in Miami Beach, Florida.

Last year, the Division joined EEOC in hosting the annual District-Wide FEPA



EEOC Philadelphia Office Director Marie Tomasso with Director J. Frank Vespa-Papaleo and Attorney General Peter C. Harvey

Conference in Atlantic City. Directors and officials from the six Fair Employment Practices Agencies (FEPAs) within the Philadelphia District engaged in two days of discussions and planning concerning initiating and maintaining joint efforts in training, outreach, enforcement, litigation and other areas of need. The Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission, the West Virginia Human Rights Commission, the Delaware Department of Labor, the Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations, and the Pittsburgh Commission on Human Relations were all represented at the two-day conference.

Of course, the foundation for our cooperative efforts comes in the form of a 25-year-old work-sharing agreement between the Division and EEOC that allows the Division to investigate and resolve dual filed charges of employment discrimination. During fiscal year 2003, the Division was reimbursed more than \$538,000 under the terms of our shared resolution contract for investigations and litigation. Indeed, joint enforcement and outreach efforts make sense from a statutory, financial and organizational standpoint. Because of our contract and similarities in state and federal laws concerning employment discrimination, we have plans to continue the sharing of resources.

Already this year, the Division and EEOC have collaborated on two important conferences. In January, both agencies joined together to hold an attorney seminar entitled, "Making and Defending a Case of Discrimination: A Primer for Practicing Before the EEOC and Division of Civil Rights. This past June, the Division and EEOC were co-sponsors of the "Hispanic Leadership Civil Rights Summit" which sought to raise awareness in the state's Latino and Hispanic communities about their rights and enforcement of the Law Against Discrimination and the Family Leave Act, as well as other services provided by state and federal government.

As the year progresses, EEOC and DCR can look forward to continued cooperative efforts. ▼

### Want to Learn More?

#### Private Training is Available

*The Division on Civil Rights offers Private Training on how to avoid and deal with discrimination.*

#### Contact the Bureau of Prevention and Community Relations at:

- Phone: 1-800-830-0647
- TTY: (609) 292-1785
- Fax: (609) 777-0466
- e-mail: [DCRTraining@lps.state.nj.us](mailto:DCRTraining@lps.state.nj.us)

Register on the Web at:  
[www.NJCivilRights.org](http://www.NJCivilRights.org)



## Hispanic Civil Rights Leadership Summit Attracts 200 People

More than 200 people attended the New Jersey Division on Civil Rights' first "Hispanic Civil Rights Leadership Summit," including attorneys, human rights advocates, union representatives and local civil rights leaders from around the state.

The daylong conference, held on June 10 at Rutgers University in Piscataway, brought together community organizations, elected officials and prominent Hispanic and Latino business leaders to discuss ways to raise awareness in the Hispanic community about rights and resources available to them if they believe they've been a victim of discrimination.

Attorney General Peter C. Harvey, who spoke at the conference, called the summit the beginning of a "dialogue to make government more accessible" to those who may be more vulnerable to disparate treatment and harassment. "Part of what we're doing is trying to encourage Latino citizens and non-citizens to take advantage of the programs and services offered through the Attorney General's Office and the Division on Civil Rights," said Harvey.

According to conference organizers, many of the more than 1.1 million Hispanics who reside in New Jersey speak no English and may be unaware of their rights and the laws that protect them against unlawful discrimination and harassment. In fact, several conference attendees representing legal, community and professional organizations stated that acts of discrimination against Latinos often go unreported.

"There are many communities that under-utilize state resources," said Shai Goldstein, director of the Anti-Defamation League of New Jersey. "Attorney General Harvey and Division on Civil Rights Director Frank Vespa-Papaleo deserve credit for being extremely aggressive in term of outreach efforts, investigations and prosecutions. It's great to have a strong civil rights law, but if communities are not aware of the protections they will not utilize it. So this type of outreach is crucial."

Hispanics make up nearly 13 percent of New Jersey's overall population, according to recent census data. Yet, of the 1,277 discrimination complaints lodged with the Division in 2003, Hispanics filed only 6.1 percent. Division Director Vespa-Papaleo cited those statistics as



**above** Panelists Marie Tomasso, Director EEOC Philadelphia; Carlos Ortiz Esq., Assistant US Attorney District of NJ; Alfred Ramey, Assistant Attorney General; Zulima Farber Esq., Lowenstein Sandler; Ramon de la Cruz, Director, Division of Elections; and J. Frank Vespa-Papaleo, Director, Division on Civil Rights



**below** J. Frank Vespa Papaleo, Director, Division on Civil Rights; Marie Tomasso, US EEOC District Director; Attorney General Peter C. Harvey; Martin Perez Esq., President Latino Leadership Alliance of NJ and Erika Spezia Maldonado, Consul of Mexico in Pennsylvania.

evidence that more public outreach is needed to explain the anti-discrimination laws enforced by the Division, as well as the services available to help reduce acts of discrimination in housing, employment and places of public accommodation.

"Last year the Division held a similar conference for the Asian-American and Pacific-American communities. The objective of that conference was to raise our visibility within those communities and to partner with community leaders on ways to raise awareness," said Vespa-Papaleo, who was born in Venezuela and became a naturalized citizen of the United States in 1988. "As a result of that conference, we have expanded our outreach into the Asian and Pacific-American communities and we expect to do the same with the Hispanic and Latino communities."

The Division publishes fact sheets for the public in English, Spanish and Arabic. The agency also employs investigators, attorneys and staff who are bi-lingual. The Division's quarterly newsletter, its Web site information and various training programs are available in both English and Spanish.

In addition to presentations on the Law Against Discrimination (LAD) and on training programs offered to employers and individuals by the Division, the June 10 summit also included presentations by the following state officials:

State Police Superintendent Rick Fuentes; Division of Highway Traffic Safety Director Roberto Rodriguez; Division of Elections Director Ramon de la Cruz; Office of Bias Crimes & Community Affairs Chief Hester Agudosi; Division of Consumer Affairs Director Reni Erdos; and Division of Alcoholic Beverage Control Director Jerry Fischer. Marie Tomasso, Philadelphia District Director for the United States Equal Employment Opportunities Commission, also spoke.

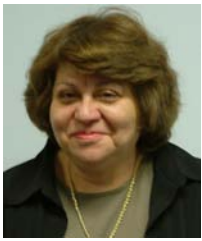
The conference also included a "Question & Answer" session moderated by Director Vespa-Papaleo and featuring the following panelists: Hispanic Bar Association President Carlos Ortiz, Assistant State Attorney General Alfred Ramey, and former New Jersey State Public Advocate and Public Defender Zulima Farber.

Lt. Richard Reyes, Chairman of the Rutherford Civil Rights Commission and a member of the Paterson Police Department, said the Hispanic Civil Rights Leadership Summit was informative and the state should sponsor more of them.

"You don't have overt discrimination anymore," said Reyes, who oversees the Paterson Police Department's Bias Unit. "It's hidden and often subtle, so it's important to get this information out to the public and to community groups so the public understands that services are available to help them." ▼



## Commission Member Says Education is Key to Helping People



*Sherine El-Abd*

Sherine El-Abd will be the first to admit that the last few years have been extremely difficult ones for Arab-Americans in the United States. The tragic events of 9/11, the ongoing unrest in the Middle East and the aftermath of the conflict in Iraq have resulted, she says, in acts of violence, harassment and bigotry towards Arab-Americans.

But the New Jersey Commission on Civil Rights member is optimistic that with education comes tolerance, and the ability for people to look beyond color, ethnicity and faith to those values and aspirations all Americans share.

"Education is very important, and it must be a two-way responsibility," said El-Abd, who is Egyptian and became a U.S. citizen in 1972. "It's up to members of the Arab-American and Muslim communities to reach out beyond their immediate circle. And when we reach out it should not be to teach a lesson, but to get to know people as individuals, so we can lose whatever label we have in their eyes and get to know each other as neighbors and co-workers."

A vocal supporter of U.S. intervention in Iraq and active in numerous Arab-American causes, Commissioner El Abd said she recently met in New York City with Samir Shakir Mahmood Sumaida'ie, a member of the newly-elected Iraqi Governing Council.

El Abd said Sumaida'ie was exiled to London in 1973 and returned to Iraq after the capture of former Iraq President Saddam Hussein.

"He is very energized and very motivated about making history for his native country, and very grateful for what the United States has done for the people of Iraq," El-Abd said of Shakir Mahmood Sumaida'ie and his role in Iraq's new government. "This is an amazing part of history that we are living through, and I am excited to be participating in it. I really believe Iraq will be a role model for other countries in the region."

As far as her work with the Commission on Civil Rights, El-Abd said she is very pleased with the Division's outreach efforts, and with enforcement initiatives to combat discrimination and bias brought by Attorney General Peter C. Harvey.

She especially applauded Division Director J. Frank Vespa-Papaleo for making informational materials on the Law Against Discrimination and enforcement

responsibilities of the Division on Civil Rights available in Arabic, and the establishment of a satellite office in Jersey City where a large portion of the state's 300,000 Arab Americans live and work.

"Much progress has been made under this director. He has raised the profile of the agency and many in the civil rights field have taken note," said El-Abd, who belongs to several Arab-American organizations including the Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, the Arab-American Institute, the Egyptian-American Business Association and the Egyptian American Professional Association.

With her two children grown, El-Abd said she devotes much of her spare time to Arab-American issues and concerns.

"I am Arab-American so I feel very passionate about focusing on these issues. But I also try to serve the entire population of New Jersey," said El-Abd, who also runs her own event-planning business out of her home in Edison. "It's tough sometimes. People don't always want to talk about these subjects because they deal with race, ethnicity and religion, and there is a great lack of knowledge and misrepresentation. But we have to talk about them and try to resolve them." ▼

## Muslim Summit Summer 2004



On July 20, the Division on Civil Rights hosted a group of leaders of New Jersey's Muslim community for an in-depth conversation regarding issues and initiatives. Pictured are the attendees. **Back row:** Director J. Frank Vespa-Papaleo, Mohamed El Filali (Islamic Center of Passaic County), Aref Assaf (Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee, NJ Chapter), Atiya Aftab (Islamic Society of Central Jersey) and Assistant Director Gary LoCassio. **Middle row:** Christina Branche, Bear Atwood, Raquiba Huq, Faiza Ali (Council on American-Islamic Relations, NJ Chapter), Alisha Mohammed (Human Rights Education and Legal Project), and Margaret Anastos (Division of Consumer Affairs). **Seated:** Imam Juan Sequillo (Islamic Educational Center of North Hudson), Ampare Soto (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission), Commissioner Sherine El-Abd, and Assistant Director Philip Freeman.



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### Asian Pacific American Heritage Month



On May 18, the Division on Civil Rights, Division of Elections and Division of Consumer Affairs commemorated Asian Pacific American Heritage Month with guests Ratepayer Advocate Seema Singh (bottom left) artist Jian (Simon) Xin Xue (top left) and WCBS-TV co-anchor Cindy Hsu (bottom right). Above right are guests and co-sponsors Simon Xian Xing, Commissioner Kun Y. Lee, Director J. Frank Vespa-Papaleo, Director Reni Erdos and Director Ramon dela Cruz.

**State of New Jersey  
Office of The Attorney General**  
Department of Law & Public Safety

**Division on Civil Rights**

# Outreach

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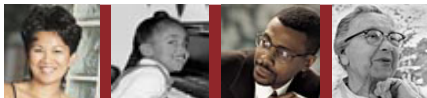
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